

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific
knowledge, policies, or practices

LIBRARY
RECEIVED

AUG 14 1936

U. S. Department of Agriculture
(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Wednesday, August 5, 1936

HOUSEKEEPER'S CHAT

SUBJECT: "FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering and the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture. Bulletin available, 1219-F, "Floors and Floor Coverings," and 1749-F, "Modernizing Farmhouses."

--ooOoo--

I'll have to admit that my topic sounds as if it were taken from a cross-word puzzle, or maybe a parlor charade. It's really about improved floors,-- but that's "better understanding", isn't it?

Anyway, you may remember that I told you several weeks ago about the farm housing survey made by the Bureaus of Home Economics, Agricultural Engineering, and various state colleges. Home owners were asked how they would spend five hundred dollars if they had it. Many of them described the bad condition of the interior finish of their homes. More than 163,000 of those who replied said they would fix the floors before anything else if they could get money to do it. At least 75,000 thought their floors would have to be entirely replaced.

Well, some of these home owners have obtained a bit of cash, either through improved markets for their farm products, or by federal loans, or in some other way. Not all of them can yet spend five hundred dollars, or even one hundred. Floors that do not have to be replaced can be helped by the expenditure of considerable "elbow grease" and a relatively small amount for varnish, wax, stain, or paint.

Do you happen to belong to one of these families in need of a "better understanding?" I can give you some suggestions about those floors, but at the same time, if you do not have a copy of Farmers' Bulletin 1219-F, Floors and Floor Coverings, which contains formulas for taking off the old coating on floors and for preparing new finishes for them, I advise you to send a postcard to the Department of Agriculture and get one. It is a handy manual for a lot of points about floors, and it is free.

Of course smooth, tight, well-finished floors are easily kept clean. Floors streaked with splinters or deep grooves should be sanded smooth. In some cases floors have been covered for years with heavy carpets fastened down with tacks. Such floors are often of softwood, and have had no finish of any kind applied to them. Sometimes the cracks between the boards are very wide and full of dust and lint.

The first thing to do is to make the floor as tight, level, and smooth as possible. Draw all remnants of tacks or drive them below the surface with a nail set. Then plane or sandpaper the floor. The next step is to scrub the wood clean with hot soapsuds or some other cleansing agent, and rinse with clear water. Most stains may be bleached out with oxalic acid. Use 1 teaspoon of the acid to 1 cup of water. (Remember that oxalic acid is a poison, which must be used carefully and kept away from children.) Spread the solution on the wood and let it stand over

night. Next morning wash out all traces of the acid or it may injure the new finish.

When the floor is thoroughly dry you can stain or varnish it, or oil it or paint it like a new floor. After the first coat of finish has been applied and allowed to dry is the time to fill up cracks and holes with filler colored to match the floor.

A simple and satisfactory crack filler can be made of genuine whiting and linseed oil putty containing about 10 percent of dry white lead and coloring matter to match the floor. Another good filler may be made of cabinet glue melted with a little water in a double boiler, thickened with fine sawdust, and colored to match the wood. This must be used while hot and can be worked smoothly into cracks with a small knife.

A slightly worn varnished floor can be renovated by rubbing scratches with a soft cloth dampened with linseed oil, or, if necessary, sandpapering them out, and brushing on a fresh coat of varnish. If a varnish floor is badly worn, the best way is to remove all the old finish possible and start anew.

Varnish and paint can be removed from a floor by scraping and planing, or by applying a chemical varnish remover. In spite of its tediousness, the first way is considered better for an inexperienced worker. After a floor has been scraped, planed, and sandpapered, it can be finished as if it were new.

Caustic soda or household lye solutions are sometimes used to remove paint or varnish. They darken oak flooring and are so strong that the hands and clothing must be carefully protected.

A soiled waxed floor is easy to renovate. Rub it over with a cloth saturated with turpentine or gasoline. Then apply a fresh coat of wax. An oiled floor that has become dark and grimy with use needs to undergo a treatment with varnish remover, and then be bleached with a strong solution of oxalic acid. Before re-oiling the floor, remove all traces of the varnish remover and acid.

Paint does not wear as well as other floor finishes, but it has the advantage of being easy to clean. A worn painted floor usually needs just a fresh coat or two of paint.

If the condition of the floors is too serious a new floor may have to be laid over the old one. This also adds stiffness to the floor. There are many satisfactory varieties of wood, and linoleum is well liked for many purposes. Concrete is often used for work-rooms and porches. There is a patented method of placing a thin concrete wearing surface over old wood floors, I'm told.

If new floors are to be laid, have them made level. If the old floor is out of level because of settling walls or girders, the supports can sometimes be jacked up or the ends of the joists raised. Another way is to use long shims or blocking under the new flooring to correct the level. The new floor is finished in any preferred way, but at present, for hardwood floors particularly, the tendency is to keep the natural color of the wood, and at the same time give it a smooth, durable finish that can be cleaned and renewed with the minimum of effort. Light colored floors show dust and footprints less readily.

Let me tell you again the name of the Farmers' Bulletins I mentioned a few minutes ago. They are Number 1219-F, entitled "Floors and Floor Coverings", and Farmers' Bulletins 1749-F, "Modernizing Farm Houses," and you can get it by writing to the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C.

